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ABSTRACT

Child care preschool programs in Sweden are a municipal responsibility and include day nurseries, part-time groups, family day nurseries, and leisure centers. According to the Social Services Act of 1982, children with special need of support (physical, mental, social, linguistic, or other needs) are to be given priority in the waiting lists for preschools and leisure centers. Care of children who are temporarily ill is also a municipal responsibility. Underlying the expansion of public child care facilities since the late 19th century is a change in people's views regarding the responsibility of public authorities in guaranteeing a good environment for children. According to the Social Services Act, municipalities are required to plan for the expansion of child care facilities for at least 5 years. According to a Parliamentary decision, full coverage of the demand for day nurseries and family day nurseries is to be achieved gradually within a 10-year period ending no later than 1986. Current public debate in Sweden centers on the contents and quality of child care programs. The structure of child care programs in terms of age categories, staff patterns, working hours, costs, and preschool activities is discussed. (AS)

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Child Care Programs in Sweden

Public child care programs in Sweden include the pre-school system and after-school recreational activities for children in their early years of compulsory schooling. These programs aim at providing children with a good, secure growth environment. They are also designed to give both men and women equal opportunities to combine gainful employment with family life.

Expansion of child care facilities was regarded in Sweden as the most important family policy issue of the 1970s. This expansion has enjoyed high priority. But public child care programs still meet only a small fraction of the demand. Relatively speaking, the number of pre-school places is still lower in Sweden than in many other industrialized countries.

Children in Sweden do not begin compulsory schooling until age 7. This late start is due to Sweden's great geographical distances and severe climate, which in earlier times made it difficult to bring together very young children for group activities. Industrialization did not lead to a large-scale migration into cities until after World War II. This triggered the growth of the pre-school system. The expansion of pre-school programs, which accelerated in the late 1960s, was due to a rapid increase in the number of gainfully employed married women and to a higher level of ambition when it comes to guaranteeing children a good growth environment.

The Organization of Child Care Programs

Child care programs in Sweden are a municipal responsibility. Facilities for child care are generally located in residential areas. These programs are financed through local tax revenues, parents' fees, and state subsidies financed via employer payroll fees.

Day nurseries at workplaces are rare. It is considered important for children that the pre-school be located in the child's own neighborhood, eliminating the need for commuting. For employees, too, day nurseries at the workplace would involve too tight a link with a specific employer able to provide child care.

Sweden's central government regulates municipal child care programs by means of the Social Services Act, which came into force on January 1, 1982. (It replaces the Child Care Act of 1977.) The programs are supervised by the county administrations and by the National Board of Health and Welfare *(Socialstyrelsen)*. The latter government agency is also responsible for stimulating pedagogical and social development work in the child care field.

According to the Social Services Act, pre-schools may be organized in the form of day nurseries or as part-time groups. The main difference is the length of time the child spends there. When a child is in a program for at least four hours a day, it is regarded as a day nursery program. There is an increasing trend toward bringing both types of program together into a single pre-school.

For many years it has been possible to accommodate children aged six months or older in *day nurseries*. This was linked to the fact that the national system of public maternity insurance previously provided allowances for six months of absence from work in connection with childbirth. In practice, most children are older than six months when they start at a day nursery, among other things, because of the shortage of places which has resulted in a system of waiting lists. In 1974, the maternity insurance scheme was transformed into a parental insurance system, which nowadays provides both parents with compensation for a total between them of twelve months of leave from work (nine months with 90% of pay and three with a fixed allowance). Part of this time may be used before childbirth and/or part later on, such as when the child starts school. (For further information see Fact Sheet FS 5, Social Insurance in Sweden.)

Part-time groups are mainly intended for somewhat older pre-school-aged children, i.e. for children aged 4—6. In 1975, a new law made places in public pre-schools available to all six-year-olds. This means that each municipality is required to provide a pre-school place for every child in that municipality starting the autumn term of the year the child turns 6. The part-time program should normally run at least 15 hours a week, i.e. three hours a day.

For *family day nurseries* the municipality hires child-minders who take up to four children into their own homes for day care. These programs are also regulated in the Social Services Act and in the rules for state subsidies. In addition to the municipal family day nurseries, private family day nurseries exist as well.

According to the Social Services Act, *children with special need of support* should be given priority in the waiting lists for pre-schools and leisure time centers. This right to priority applies to children who for physical, mental, social, linguistic or other reasons require special support in their development. The municipality is required to organize outreach (case-finding) activities to discover which children need this special kind of support.

Care of *children who are temporarily ill* is an important part of the child care system. The public authorities are also responsible for care during periods when, due to temporary illness, a child cannot attend a pre-school, leisure time center or family day nursery. Such care is provided by means of municipally employed child-minders who care for the child in its own home.

Child care programs for younger schoolchildren assume the form of *leisure time centers* and family day nurseries. The leisure time centers accommodate children during those parts of the day when they do not have school classes, as well as during school vacations. In other words, their main purpose is to meet the need for full-day care of children with gainfully employed parents, also giving children with special needs support in their development. The leisure time centers employ recreational leaders and child-minders. They accommodate children aged 7—10 (sometimes up to 12).

Public child care includes other supplementary programs, such as park playground activities, open pre-schools, and toy-lending libraries. In the *open pre-*

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school parents and children together can meet other parents and children for shared activities and to exchange experiences.

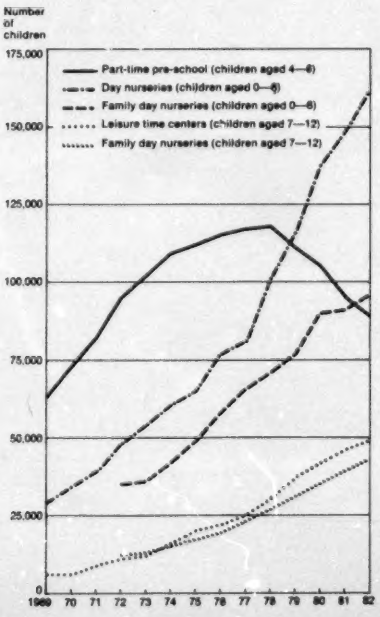
Expansion

Public child care programs were started in Sweden in the late 19th century and early 20th century, then in the form of crèches intended as part of poor relief programs. There were also kindergartens inspired by the educational ideas of Fröbel, in which children were compared with flowers requiring tender care. The crèches were open all day and their staff members were mainly without training. They were operated because they were absolutely necessary, and they provided few advantages for the children. The kindergartens were part-time institutions for children from well-to-do homes. They had well-trained teachers, a pedagogical program and suitable premises. The first public initiatives aimed at creating a better designed pre-school system were undertaken in the 1930s and 1940s on the basis of recommendations by government commissions. But it was only after the 1968 Commission on Child Centers delivered its reports that the groundwork was laid for the creation of a uniformly organized Swedish pre-school. These reports were published in 1972. The following year, the Government presented an important Bill on expansion and organizational structure of the pre-school system. The first law on pre-school programs went into effect in 1975. Since the beginning of 1982, child care has been governed by the Social Services Act.

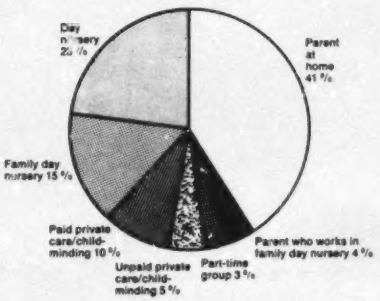
Until 1965, the number of places in day nurseries remained virtually unchanged, while an initial expansion took place at play schools (roughly equivalent to today's part-time groups) and in the municipal family day nurseries. Since then there has been a relatively rapid expansion of day nurseries, although far from sufficient to meet demands.

According to a demand survey conducted by Statistics Sweden at the beginning of fiscal year 1982/83, about 60,000 children (10%) had private paid child

Trends in public child care, 1950—1980



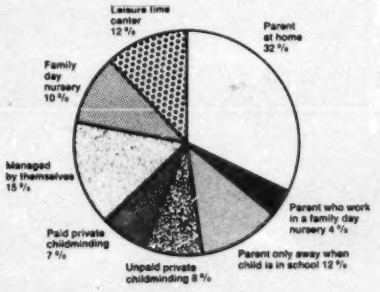
Child care, children aged 0—6


Day nursery 20 %
Parent at home 41 %
Family day nursery 15 %
Paid private care/child-minding 10 %
Unpaid private care/child-minding 5 %
Part-time group 3 %
Parent who works in family day nursery 4 %

care, roughly 31,000 (5%) had other child care—primarily with relatives—while 290,000 (44%) had one parent or guardian at home all the time. According to the same survey, 248,000 (58%) of the 426,000 children whose parent(s) or guardian(s) were gainfully employed or studying had places in the municipal child care system. There was a demand for municipal child care for 88,000 additional children, of which 60,000 preferably in day nursery places and 27,000 in family day nurseries. In 1982, children aged 0—6 totaled 671,300 and children aged 7—12 662,800.

At the close of 1982 there were 151,100 day nursery places, which means that 22% of children aged 0—6 in Sweden had such places. In addition, 97,000 children of pre-school age were in family day nurseries; the remaining 44,300 places in family day nurseries were occupied by children of school age. In all, 248,100 children or about 36% of those aged 0—6 were accommodated in day nurseries or family day nurseries.

Child care, children aged 7—10


Leisure time center 12 %
Parent at home 32 %
Family day nursery 10 %
Managed by themselves 15 %
Paid private childminding 7 %
Unpaid private childminding 8 %
Parent who work in a family day nursery 4 %
Parent only away when child is in school 12 %

At the end of 1982 another 60,600 children aged 7—12 had places in leisure time centers and, as mentioned above, 44,300 children in this age group were in family day nurseries, in other words almost 17% of children aged 7—12 had municipal child care. There was at the end of 1982 a demand for roughly an additional 27,000 places for children aged 7—10.

Part-time pre-schools underwent continuous expansion after 1940. In the past few years, however, the number of children in part-time groups has declined somewhat, due to the smaller number of children being born and the growing number of openings in full-time day nurseries.

Changed Family Patterns

Underlying the expansion of public child care facilities and the increasing needs are important social changes—above all an increase in the proportion of women who have gainful employment, but also a change in people's way of viewing the responsibility of public authorities to guarantee a good environment in which children can grow up.

In 1965, 27% of all women in Sweden with children under age 7 were gainfully employed at least half-time. By 1984 this figure had climbed to more than 80%. Young women are better educated today, a fact which has given women a stronger position on the labor market. In addition, the economic rewards of work have increased. In negotiations with management, the trade unions have pursued a so-called wage policy of solidarity, aimed at narrowing wage gaps. As a result, women's wages in industry have been raised gradually to the point where they now amount to just over 90% of men's average income. At the same time, it has become easier for women to hold down a paying job due to wider use of work-saving household equipment and pre-cooked or partially prepared foods. The structure of the labor market has changed, mainly due to an expansion of traditionally female-dominated occupations and an increase in the number of part-time jobs. The number of children per family has decreased.

The growing number of gainfully employed women reflects a profound and still continuing change in Swedish family patterns. During the first half of the 20th century, the predominant pattern was a gainfully employed man married to a housewife. Today the predominant pattern is the two-breadwinner family, i.e. where both husband and wife are gainfully employed—with short or long interruptions when children are born. These interruptions in gainful employment when the children are small are tending to become shorter than before. Statistics indicate that eight out of ten gainfully employed women have resumed their jobs already twelve months after a child is born.

Quite a few families still live according to the old pattern, and there are many intermediate forms. Full equality between men and women is by no means characteristic of most families where both parents have jobs. Many women work outside the home part-time, and in the great majority of cases it is the woman who carries the main burden of caring for the home and children. Nonetheless, a profound change has occurred which requires fresh thinking in family policy.

The two-breadwinner family has needs which traditional family policy has not met. This applies to the need for secure child care for pre-school children as well as for younger schoolchildren during the time they are not in classes. The parental insurance system has, however, been expanded and nowadays gives parents the opportunity to take a leave of absence from work (i.e. in addition to the above-mentioned twelve months), with compensation, in connection with childbirth, to take part in parenthood training, to help their children adjust to a day nursery or start regular school, and in other situations such as during a child's illness or in the event of problems at the day nursery or in school. It is necessary to have working hours and a work environment that make it possible to combine gainful employment with good contact with the children and good care of them.

The expansion of day nurseries is an

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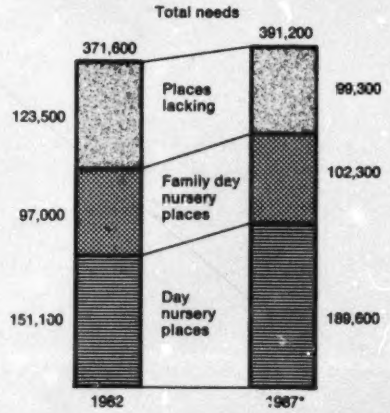
important element in a reorientation of Swedish family policy so that it also fulfills the needs of two-breadwinner families. Other aspects of this reorientation are the individual taxation system introduced in 1971 and the above-mentioned parental insurance scheme initiated in 1974.

Planning

According to the Social Services Act, municipalities are required to plan for the expansion of child care facilities. The municipality is to draw up a child care plan that reports local care requirements and the ways in which they will be met. The plan should cover at least five years. The purpose of requiring municipalities to have these plans is to stimulate broad public discussion of child care needs and thereby speed up the pace of expansion. In 1975, an agreement was also reached between the Government and the Association of Local Authorities *(Svenska kommunförbundet)*—an organization through which Sweden's municipalities collaborate. The agreement, which received parliamentary approval, stated that the municipalities were to expand child care facilities, adding 100,000 new day nursery places during the five-year period 1976—1980. The agreement also stated that 50,000 new places in leisure time centers were to be created during the same period. To facilitate this expansion, a new system of state subsidies was introduced. However, the municipalities did not succeed in fulfilling the goal of 100,000 new day nursery places in five years. Only some 65,000 have actually been built.

In 1976, Parliament also established a general objective for the expansion of child care programs. This objective was—in addition to the public pre-schools already open to older children before regular schooling—to make available a place in the municipal child care system to every child of pre-school age whose parents were gainfully employed or studying, and to each child in need of special support and encouragement, thereby meeting the demand for such places. According to the parliamentary decision, this objective—full coverage of demand for day nurseries and family day nurseries—was to be achieved gradually within a ten-year period ending no later than 1986. But no plan has been presented for the second stage of expansion to the point where the demand is met.

Child care 1972 and 1987, children aged 0—6*



* According to the most recently available plans and forecasts from local governments

Structure of Child Care Programs

Nowadays the children in day nurseries are either divided in separate age categories or according to the principle of sibling groups and infant groups. Age-grouping used to be the rule, but today it is increasingly common for groups to be based on age-mixing—sibling groups that include children aged about 2½—7, and infant groups for younger children. The infant groups contain no more than 12 children each, the sibling groups generally 15—20. In many places there is integration of children from different age groups, even from six months up to 12 years.

The staff members at pre-schools mainly include pre-school teachers and children's nurses. Pre-school teachers have undergone a two-year training course after upper secondary school. Children's nurse training takes place within the upper secondary school's two-year nursing line, but is also available in special courses lasting one term or one school year. Children's nurses have the opportunity to return to school for further training as pre-school teachers. Bilingual pre-school teacher training is a specialization aimed at students whose native language is not Swedish. This special training leads to certification allowing the teacher to work with both Swedish children and children from their own language group. Advanced training is a municipal responsibility. Its length varies from one municipality to another. Between 21 and 40 hours of advanced training per year is common for the staffs of pre-schools or leisure time centers. As a rule the pre-schools have 4—5 children per adult, with a lower number of children per staff member in infant groups. This means that, internationally speaking, the Swedish pre-schools have a very low child-staff ratio.

Day nurseries are generally open during so-called normal working hours. They open between 6:30—6:45 a.m. and close at 6—6:30 p.m. In a few municipalities a state-subsidized pilot project is testing evening and night nurseries and other forms of night-time child care.

Collaboration with parents, sibling group activities and work teams are essential characteristics of Swedish pre-school working methods. The work team concept implies that personnel should not have strictly divided work tasks, but should work side by side and make decisions together on the different activities. This is also regarded as a way of teaching children how to work together with others and solve problems through collaborative efforts.

Pre-school programs should of course not be regarded as a substitute for the parents' role in caring for children, but rather as an aid and supplement. It is important that home and pre-school should not become two separate worlds for a child. For this reason much attention is now being given to increasing the contacts between parents and pre-schools. This means that parents are being encouraged to assume an active part in the pre-school programs. Experiments are also being undertaken to increase the opportunities for parents to influence the pre-schools.

An important form of support for better contacts and collaboration between the pre-school and parents is that nowadays the parental insurance entitles every parent to take a leave of absence for contacts with public child care programs.

It is considered important for parents to participate in an introductory period of about two weeks so that a child can make a smooth adjustment to the new environment. This settling-in period is also important for the adults, as it gives pre-school staff members and parents a chance to become acquainted with each other, and it allows the parents to learn about the environment at the day nursery. The staff try to establish personal contact with both the father and the mother, encouraging them to share responsibility for the settling-in period and for continued contacts with the day nursery. The right to take days off from work with compensation from the parental insurance system in order to participate in the work of the pre-school may of course also be used by fathers.

As mentioned above, in municipal family day nurseries a child-minder accommodates a group of children in her/his own home. Normally, a child-minder is allowed to care for a maximum of four children, including her/his own. Today there is a training course for these child-minders which lasts three weeks. About 30% of those currently running family day nurseries have completed this course. People who run family day nurseries are employed by the municipality according to an agreement which regulates salary and employment conditions. There are also agreements guaranteeing them a certain degree of income security, for example even if the children are absent due to illness or the like. As far as salary and income security are concerned, however, the child-minder is in a weaker position than other public employees. Sometimes child-minders in a neighborhood will work together in a group. It is also becoming more common for municipalities to arrange regular meetings with people running family day nurseries and the pre-school in the neighborhood provide these child-minders with assistance.

The municipal leisure time centers are places children can visit either before or after school, as well as during any free hours during the school day. Nowadays these centers are kept open nearly all year round, generally with the same hours as the day nurseries. Each center accepts 15—25 children aged 7—10 (sometimes up to 12).

Activities of the Pre-schools

The working methods of the pre-school imply that everyday situations, children's games and adult work as well as contacts with the immediate surroundings are utilized as natural situations for learning and development. The activities of the pre-schools should be well-planned and be based largely on the children's life situation, their interests, previous experience and special needs. The staff of each pre-school should continuously plan its program.

Creative play is an important part of the work of pre-schools. Singing and music, rhythmic and dramatic creativity should be daily activities, along with pictorial and plastic arts using different materials. Paints, clay, wood and other media—as well as materials that encourage children to play together and that can be used in varied and imagina-

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tive ways—are thus an obvious part of the basic equipment of pre-schools. Unstructured play should be a part of the daily program. It is also important that the adults at the pre-school, together with the children, are able to develop their special fields of interest and talent.

Another important part of pre-school activities is the daily chores related to cooking, dishwashing, cleaning, gardening, repairs and errands. The children can work together in these and take joint responsibility. They also provide rich opportunities for learning in a natural context which is meaningful to the children.

There is a strong ambition not to isolate the pre-school from the rest of society. It is thus an important principle that the pre-schools should operate in relatively small units in residential areas. This makes it easier for parents to work together with the pre-schools and may create a network of social contacts among families with children. Making children familiar with the society they live in by letting them find out about everything outside the pre-school—worklife, nature, and cultural events—is an essential part of pre-school activities.

Immigrant Children

According to the Social Services Act, children needing help from the municipal child care system for reasons of language are offered places on a priority basis. Children for whom a language other than Swedish is a vital part of their home environment are offered training in that language. Such training includes not only immigrant children but also Lapp and Finnish-speaking children in Norrbotten (Sweden's northernmost county), i.e. all children who speak another language than Swedish at home.

The municipalities receive state subsidies for training five- and six-year-olds in their *home language*. About 1 000 of the children aged 0—6 in the pre-school system (8%) are immigrant children. About 60% of these children receive backing in their mother tongue in the pre-school. The training is supposed to be for at least four hours a week. Participation is voluntary. Some examples of organizational forms for this language training are:

- unilingual part-time groups where immigrant children are accepted from age 4
- unilingual sibling groups at day nurseries
- small groups of immigrant children integrated into a pre-school or a leisure time center, with access to bilingual staff
- integration of immigrant children into pre-school groups with access to rotating teachers of their home language
- an open unilingual pre-school to which younger immigrant children can come together with their parents.

A special government commission, assigned the task of reviewing the language situation of immigrant children, has in its report recommended that all children in municipal day care, with another home language than Swedish, should get backing in their mother tongue. The commission proposes that this be settled in a special act.

Costs

The operating costs for day nurseries are estimated at about SEK 50,000 per child during 1984. The central government pays an annual subsidy of SEK 22,000 per child, provided they spend at least seven hours in the day nursery. If children spend four to seven hours there a half-subsidy, i.e. SEK 11,000 per child, is payable. In addition to these per-child grants there is a subsidy of SEK 30,000 per full-time-equivalent employee per year. This applies to staff members directly active with a group of children. For children requiring special support, the municipality receives SEK 6,000 for every 10 children in the program.

The state subsidy for children in leisure time centers is SEK 7,000 per child per year, with no attendance requirements specified. Grants per full-time-equivalent employee and for children needing special support, payable for day nursery children, are also available for children attending leisure time centers.

For each child who spends seven or more hours in a family day nursery, the municipality receives a state subsidy of SEK 15,000. If a child spends less than seven hours there, a half-subsidy of SEK 7,500 is payable. Unlike day nurseries, there is no lower limit for the time a child must spend in the family day nursery to qualify the municipality for a state grant.

Subsidies of up to SEK 50,000 per unit are payable to the open municipal pre-schools. Such programs exist in some residential areas and include children of pre-school age who attend together with a parent or a child-minder. In an open pre-school, a pre-school teacher can provide parents and child-minders with pedagogical guidance while the child participate in pre-school activities. Most of the municipalities have fees that vary according to the income of the parents. On average, parents pay about SEK 5,000 per child per year. There are no centrally recommended fee levels for the leisure time centers. In many cases the amount is linked to the local day nursery fee and is about 40—50% as high. Part-time pre-schools are free for six-year-olds and for younger children needing special support.

Current Issues and Problems

Current public debate in Sweden is increasingly based on the assumption that day nurseries have come to stay. Discussion is no longer so much concerned with the issue of whether day nurseries "are good or bad," but it centers instead on the question of what constitutes a good day nursery. In order to develop the contents and quality of the pre-schools and leisure-time centers, official pedagogical programs are being devised for these institutions. There are however, still sizeable groups of people who feel that really small children, i.e. those under 2—3 years, should not attend day nurseries. The government Commission on Family Aid has published extensive investigative material in its report "Good Day Care for Small Children." This material does not provide any support for such views. It gives valuable background for discussions on how day nurseries for very young children should best be designed.

Staff members at day nurseries and the parents of children attending them have together become a strong pressure group working toward raising the quality of day nurseries. In comparison, those parents who have not obtained a place for their children at day nurseries do not constitute such a closely knit group capable of presenting collective demands for an increase in the number of places.

Extensive developmental work is being carried out in the Swedish pre-school system. It includes increased mixing of age groups, yielding good results in experiments with extended sibling groups with children from a very young age up to 10—12 years. This work also includes experiments on forms of settling-in and collaboration with parents, where group discussions in study circle form have proved to work well. Different types of child care during evenings and nights are another extremely important issue. Public discussion on this matter will hopefully become more closely tied with actual experiences, since various kinds of child care during unconventional hours are now being tested in practice and these pilot projects have been combined with thorough follow-ups and research. Because of the rapid expansion of child care programs, they have developed differently in the various municipalities. Learning from and documenting the experiences of these programs are important in the task of developing and updating them. The Government thus distributes SEK 30 million per year for local development work.

The municipalities have the right to decide on norms for the size of groups and premises, as well as for the staff-child ratio in pre-schools in their respective municipalities.

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